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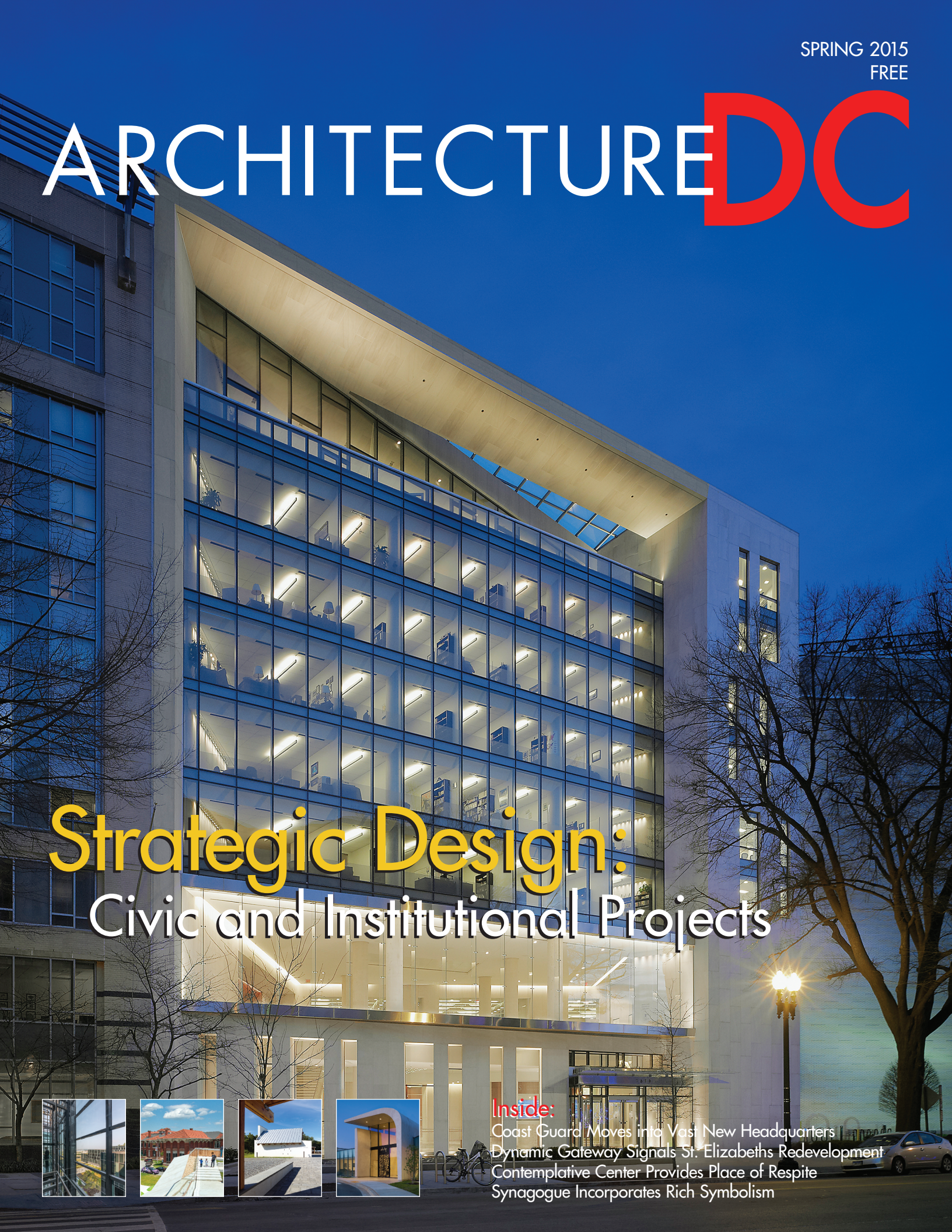

Strategic Design:
Civic and Institutional Projects

Inside:

Coast Guard Moves into Vast New Headquarters
Dynamic Gateway Signals St. Elizabeths Redevelopment
Contemplative Center Provides Place of Respite
Synagogue Incorporates Rich Symbolism

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"The Commons" in the Intermediate School at the Potomac School, by cox graae + spack architects.

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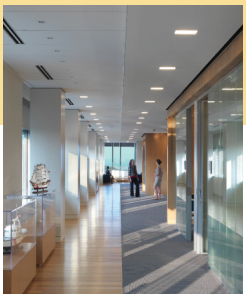

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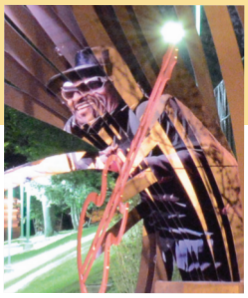

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DESIGN LIKE A GIRL

Bradley W. Johnson

In researching my remarks for last year's black-tie Fall Design Fête, our annual fundraising dinner, I asked our university scholarship students about the moment that they knew they wanted to become an architect. I got some great answers, including one from Aime Vailes-Macarie, who graduates this year from Pratt, that I read verbatim to the Fête audience.

The question of "When did you know?" came up again recently when I was at an opening reception for an exhibition at the National Building Museum of architectural prints owned by David M. Schwarz. (David, it turns out, discovered architecture when he was very young.) Following that reception, I sent out a call to our entire membership to let me know when they first fell for architecture, and I've now received a number of responses. These origin stories have been a lot of fun to read, but they have also revealed something important: Quite often, there was a mentor involved—someone who showed a younger person what architecture was all about, and that it could be a great career opportunity.

Welcome!

I mention this because, as I've noted before, if I had been exposed to architecture at a younger age, I might have become an architect. I didn't understand that architecture was something I might consider as a career until I was a senior in college.

The recent and instructive "Like A Girl" TV commercial from Always, which asks people to "throw like a girl" or "run like a girl," got me thinking about this again. One of the many powerful moments in this commercial—which, as of this writing, has been viewed more than 55 million times on YouTube—is when a young girl is asked, "What does it mean to run like a girl?" and she replies, "To run as fast as you can." She doesn't know that the phrase "like a girl" can be pejorative—to her, it just means doing her best.

In that same spirit, it's time to encourage more girls to get into architecture and design, so that they can help change the world for the better by (in the reclaimed sense of the phrase) "designing like a girl."

In support of that goal, the Washington Architectural Foundation this year is doing a lot of programming specifically focused on girls. We're working with the Girl Scouts, the Boys and Girls Club, and some upcoming engineering events to encourage girls to consider architecture as a possible career. We're opening a door that might eventually lead to greater gender equality in a profession that needs it.

If you look at the projects we've included in this issue and count how many female architects and designers are quoted, you'll get a rough indication of how comparatively few women are practicing in the field today. There are a lot of reasons for this situation, of course, and the effort we're undertaking this year addresses only one of them. But if we can expose girls to this opportunity and make them feel welcome in the profession, who knows what the next generation of architects could do? How much more amazing could great architecture be?

Mary Fitch, AICP, Hon. AIA
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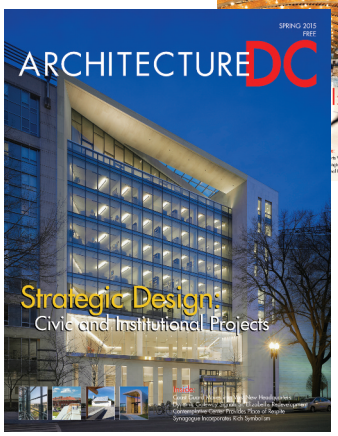


Cover Stories:

New Exhibition at DAC Shows the Impact of *ARCHITECTUREDC* Magazine

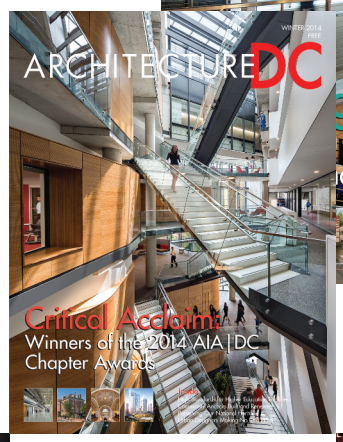
February 18-April 4, 2015

Cover Stories: ARCHITECTUREDC Magazine, 2003–2014, is an engaging exhibition showcasing cover stories published by the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA | DC) in its magazine, *ARCHITECTUREDC*, since 2003.

The exhibition includes many of the covers that have brought *ARCHITECTUREDC* recognition and continued growing readership over the last dozen years. Copies of past issues will also be displayed, encouraging exhibition-goers to revisit the stories within.

ARCHITECTUREDC is a magazine for the public (although it is also read by design professionals). AIA | DC created it to promote the work of its members, help the public learn about architecture and the value of architects, and bring attention to new trends in building design and home furnishings. The publication was known as *AIADC Magazine* from 1999 to 2002. It was published by Dawson Publications, Inc., through 2003, when its name changed to *ARCHITECTUREDC*.

ARCHITECTUREDC is published quarterly and distributed to more than 22,000 subscribers. Readers discover stories about award-winning commercial, institutional, and residential projects, as well as cutting-edge trends in design and new projects in neighborhoods throughout the region (and sometimes beyond). The magazine received a Gold Circle Award in 2008 from the American Society of Association Executives for excellence in print publishing.



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Threshold of Change:

The St. Elizabeths East Gateway Pavilion

by Ronald O'Rourke

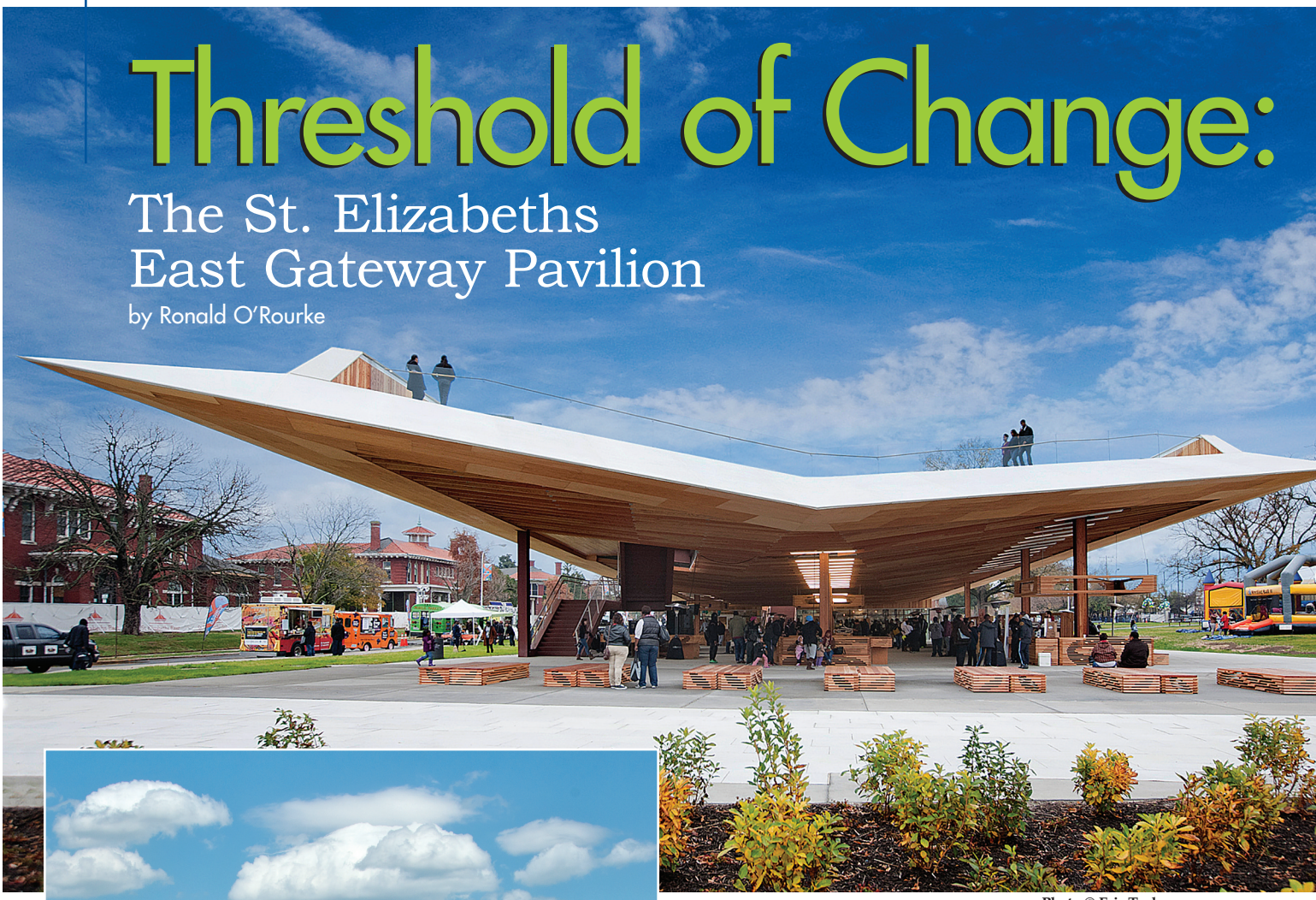

Photo © Eric Taylor

View from the roof of the pavilion toward some of the historic buildings of the East Campus.

Photo © Davis Brody Bond

St. Elizabeths Hospital—properly spelled with no apostrophe—opened in 1855 as the first federally operated psychiatric hospital in the country. Built on a bucolic site in the Anacostia area of southeast DC, the hospital grew rapidly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but changes in mental health protocols beginning in the 1950s led to a steep decline in the number of patients housed there. The hospital was later consolidated into a smaller facility on the institution's East Campus, control of which was transferred to the DC government. The federal government retained ownership of the West Campus, which is now being redeveloped as the headquarters of the Department of Homeland Security and its constituent agencies.

Project: St. Elizabeths East Gateway Pavilion, Washington, DC

Architects: **Davis Brody Bond**
Landscape Architects: **Gustafson Guthrie Nichol**
Structural Engineers: **Robert Silman Associates**
MEP Engineers/Sustainability and Lighting Consultants: **WSP Flack + Kurtz**
Civil Engineers: **A. Morton Thomas & Associates**
General Contractor: **KADCON Corporation**

Side view of the pavilion

Photo © Eric Taylor

The dynamically shaped St. Elizabeths East Gateway Pavilion is an initial step in implementing a city master plan for turning the 180-acre East Campus into a mixed-use development. Located on a two-acre, park-like site inside the campus, the pavilion, designed by **Davis Brody Bond**—an architecture and planning firm with offices in Washington, New York, and São Paulo— is a multipurpose facility that can be used for a farmers' market, informal dining, and neighborhood events. The project serves as a community-building device for an area that has been at the margin of the city's development boom over the last decade.

"The genesis of the project was the DC government's desire to redevelop the East Campus as a center for innovative businesses, thus simultaneously repurposing and rejuvenating a collection of underutilized government-owned buildings, and, it was hoped, spurring broader economic development in the area," said G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA, editor of this magazine and a member of the jury that selected David Brody Bond as the architect for the project. Other members of the jury included design professionals, area residents, and other citizens. The jury was organized by the DC Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, which is also the client for the project.

"The city's goals included erecting a landmark structure to serve as a symbol for the redevelopment initiative, creating a public amenity for surrounding neighborhoods, and providing a commercial, cultural, and recreational node for the growing numbers of workers in the area, including those working in the Department of Homeland Security facilities on the West Campus." Moeller said. "The pavilion was to be temporary, but everyone involved recognized that it was likely to stand for a number of years, and therefore needed to be sturdy and durable."

The ground level of the 400-foot-long, 16,500-square-foot structure includes an open-air market space with modular booths for vendors, open-air dining spaces, and 5,200 square feet of enclosed space, including a community room, a recycling and storage room, restrooms, and a space for a future café or kitchen.

The structure's signature design element is its sloping roof—a ramp that rises gradually from the ground level at one end of the structure to a height of 24 feet at the

View of the pavilion's ramp

Photo © Davis Brody Bond

Market space under the pavilion.

Photo © Davis Brody Bond

other, creating a large surface for a rooftop park with an open-air theater and an overlook. The butterfly shape of the roof's underside adds to the design's energy, enhances the sense of airiness for ground-level spaces below, and provides a dramatic contrast to the heavy masonry buildings abutting the site. The project's use of a ramp-roof brings to mind the similar form of the Opera House in Oslo, Norway, an acclaimed building by the architecture firm Snøhetta.

The pavilion's ramp was inspired by the gentle slope of the existing site, a green space surrounded by decommissioned hospital buildings. "The pavilion focuses on the seamless integration of the structure and the land," Davis Brody Bond said. "This of-the-land approach takes its cues from the architectural program, which is centered on the provision of fresh produce, locally made crafts, and a variety of food truck vendors to serve the local population."

"The ground level," the firm elaborated, "allows for easy connections from the most prominent edges of the site, creating three distinct zones and connecting the urban face of the project to the more pastoral campus setting. The roof level access allows pedestrians to gain a new perspective on the neighborhood."

Sustainable design elements in the project include rainwater cisterns, roof plantings to reduce the heat-island effect (which in turn reduces demand on mechanical systems in the enclosed portion of the pavilion), a reliance on natural ventilation, and recycled or renewable materials, including reclaimed wood.

The pavilion, the firm said, "creates an instantly iconic, visible, and welcoming view into the site, particularly from the vantage points that reflect the existing and anticipated movements of people from different areas of the neighborhood."

Photo © Eric Taylor

The pavilion at dusk.

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Hidden in Plain Sight:

Coast Guard Headquarters Rises Above an Ocean of Constraints

by Steven K. Dickens, AIA, LEED AP

All photos © James and Connor Steinkamp

At 1.2 million square feet in the new main building, the Douglas A. Munro U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters complex is among the largest buildings in Washington. Its site is quite visible from many parts of the city's monumental core. But the various architects involved with the project—some of the most prominent names in U.S. architectural practice—pulled off an impressive trick: this massive complex keeps a very low profile, yet scores high on design aesthetic, user experience, and a number of other common-sense and client-mandated requirements.

SmithGroup (now SmithGroupJJR) started the process in 2006, creating a master plan to consolidate offices for the various "mission critical" agencies of the newly-created Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on the West Campus of St. Elizabeths, the long-shuttered psychiatric asylum that was once home to some 8,000 residents. The historic hospital campus is on a plateau at the top of a steep hillside sweeping down to I-295, the Naval Support Facility Anacostia (formerly Bolling Air Force Base), and the Anacostia River. It has expansive views. The master plan established a variety of requirements aimed at keeping new construction at the scale of the historic buildings and maintaining the greenery of the hillside. (For the final master plan and pretty much anything one might want to know about the process, history, social and physical character of the site, see *www.stelizabethsdevelopment.com*.)

View through the main elevator bank of the US Coast Guard Headquarters, with the building's cascading wings and green roofs visible beyond.

A shared-space "node," with an accent color corresponding to its position within the building (in this case, green, indicating the middle level).

A daylit corridor lined with model ships.

Project: Douglas A. Munro US Coast Guard Headquarters Complex, Washington, DC

Architects for Design/Bridging Document Phase: **Perkins+Will**
Architects of Record: **WDG Architecture**
Interior Designers: **Perkins+Will** (Programming/Design/Bridging); **HOK** (Record)
Campus Master Planners: **SmithGroup**
Landscape Architects: **Andropogon Associates** (Design/Bridging); **HOK** (Record)
Lighting Designers: **Horton Lees Brogden** (Design/Bridging); **MCLA** (Record)
Structural Engineers: **Thornton Tomasetti** (Design/Bridging); **Cagley & Associates** (Record)
MEP Engineers: **Environmental Systems Design** (Bridging); **Girard Engineering** (Record)
Geotechnical Engineers: **GeoConcepts** (Design/Bridging); **ECS Mid-Atlantic** (Record)
Civil Engineers: **William H. Gordon Associates** (Bridging); **Loiderman Soltesz Associates** (Record)
General Contractor: **Clark Construction Group**

Dozens of additional firms served as consultants to the design/build team and to the US General Services Administration for this project.

Main lobby, featuring an art work by Tere
based on an abstracted star chart.

A green-roofed courtyard, with the "Hatteras Light" elevator tower visible just left of center.

All photos © James and Connor Steinkamp

The first major piece of the master plan to be executed is the U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters. **Perkins+Will,** which had done interior design work for the Coast Guard previously, won the commission through the GSA's Design Excellence program in 2008.

A dip in the hillside dropping down from the historic hospital campus is the site for the new building. It is basically an office building housing a myriad of commands and administrative services, most of which are secure, a few of which are "SCIFs"—Secure Compartmented Information Facilities—by definition, at the highest level of security. A half-dozen of the historic buildings were repurposed as specialty uses associated with the headquarters: the credit union, fitness center, PX (military general store), conference center, security offices, and offices for the Coast Guard Historian. The original St. Elizabeths dining hall was renovated for use as the cafeteria, the only example of reuse for the original purpose.

The green swath of the Anacostia Ridge is a subtle but very important asset to the city. It is only about 120 feet tall, but in warm months it forms part of the green fringe surrounding the "bowl" of downtown DC. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the site was to place a large building in the middle of this swath, and accordingly almost every aspect of the exterior design responds in one or more ways to the goal of reducing the visibility of the building, especially in distant views, according to Perkins+Will's senior designer for the project, **Thomas Mozina, AIA, LEED AP BD+C.**

The most direct response is the expansive vegetated roofs, most of which have much larger plants, in much more elaborate arrangements, than standard low-profile sedum roofs. In another straightforward nod to the natural setting, fieldstone is used for many wall elements. For the exterior building façades, a quasi-natural irregularity is a dominant theme: multiple colors in the exterior materials, asymmetrical facades, deep window openings that give dark shadows, and so forth. Up close, these elements stylishly provide variety and interest, but from a distance, they create a sort of architectural camouflage, helping the building blend into its natural surroundings. Even the night view was considered. Usually glazing is mostly designed to control the light coming into a building, but here it equally controls the light going out, so that at night the building isn't a beacon.

Perkins+Will's base-building team (in the firm's Chicago office) and interiors team (in the DC office) worked closely, along with the landscape architect, Andropogon Associates LTD of Philadelphia. The master plan mandated red brick and punched windows to relate to the historic hospital complex. Perkins+Will complied for façades that face outward, but, in a brilliant departure, used extensive glass on most of the courtyard-facing facades. **Ralph Johnson, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C,** design director at Perkins+Will, described it in geological terms: "It's almost like a geode, solid on the outside and crystalline on the inside." This was an inspired move. Not only is the glass much more effective as architectural camouflage than red brick, but it smartly capitalizes on the site's views, and sets an appropriate tone for the modern, high-tech Coast Guard.

Breaking the complex into multiple wings that step down the hillside followed master plan requirements to maintain a low profile, but it also proved to be a synergistic design move, especially in conjunction with the glazed courtyard facades. Relative to a standard, monolithic office building, multiple wings inherently allow for more daylighting, views, and access to the outdoors for employees; protect against progressive structural failure in the event of a natural disaster or human-launched attack; and make the experience of circulating through the building engaging. They also provide a distinct sense of identity to each of the various departments and sub-departments within the Coast Guard, while the abundant glass promotes visual communication between them.

The architects started by determining the ideal building depth and column spacing to provide flexibility of use and ensure abundant natural light and views. They settled on a 30-foot module. Lower levels are three modules (90 feet) deep, slimming via setbacks to two modules (60 feet) at the parapet level of most wings. Columns were carefully located to allow multiple types of office arrangements—closed offices, cubicles, and shared-use spaces—to anticipate the inevitable future organizational shifts. In fact, during the period of design and construction, the Coast Guard underwent one such reorganization, causing a substantial reallocation of the interior spaces. "The design met its first test before it was even finished," noted **Lynn Goldfarb, AIA, LEED AP BD+C,** who led Perkins+Will's Washington team.

The complex has three basic levels, each with a large rooftop courtyard. The landscape architects, Andropogon Associates, conceptualized them as three regional ecosystems. The top courtyard features rocks and trees of the Piedmont; the center, grasses and bushes of the alluvial plain; and the bottom a large pond with the grasses and reeds of a tidal marsh. Each associated building level has a coordinated accent color that appears in the open offices and shared-space pantry and copy room nodes: rust at the top; green in the middle; and blue at the bottom.

The formal entrance is at the top of the hillside, facing the historic hospital campus. It is a semi-separate pavilion, sized for visiting delegations, with generous light but controlled views. Immediately beyond a security/reception checkpoint, however, one enters the "Bridge," a glassy corridor. Analogous to the command center of a ship, this bridge overlooks the roofs and courtyards of the entire headquarters complex, as well as the panorama of the city and the rivers. It's easy for the Commandant to impress high-level visitors.

Adjacent to the "Bridge" is a bank of glass elevators known as "Hatteras Light" which runs the entire height of the complex. (Lighthouses are in the Coast Guard's purview, and the famous one at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, is the tallest in the U.S.) The upper levels, above grade, where the elevators are in glass shafts, offer the same stunning views outward, but when the elevators plunge below grade, into black concrete shafts, the focus shifts to the people in adjacent elevators and the cables, counterweights, and other moving elements of the elevators. At the very bottom, one is deep in the hillside, and a long corridor, with a window providing (literally) a light the end of the tunnel, leads to the office spaces of the LL9 level.

A courtyard with the "Bridge" visible in the left background.

View looking beyond the tiered courtyards toward the juncture of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers.

All photos © James and Connor Steinkamp

Perkins+Will completed the project to a point known as "bridging documents," at which time the project was put out to bid for design-build teams. The winning team was led by Clark Construction with the Washington office of **WDG** as the "executive architect." Working with WDG and Clark was a small army of consultants, some 27 total, including, for interior design, sustainability, and landscape architecture, the Washington office of **HOK.** Because of schedule limitations related to the use of federal stimulus funds, the team had only eight months to pull construction documents together.

This project had a lot of cooks in the kitchen, trying to whip up an immensely large meal very quickly—seemingly a recipe for disaster. WDG's project manager **Durwood Dixon, AIA,** noted, "It might not have been possible, really, except that we were in recession. We were lucky, in a way, that every consultant was in the same shape we were [economically], so they put their best people on the job. That's how we did it in such a short time frame."

While one hopes that the particular circumstances of the Great Recession do not recur, the resultant complex is a wonder. The seemingly overwhelming pile of standards and requirements involved—for security, sustainability, employee quality of life, sensitivity to historic and natural settings, the community outside the fence, and so forth—are hidden in plain sight, synthesized into a seamless whole by the rambling layout, courtyards, vistas, design choices, and material selections. That is to say, these qualities are hidden and synthesized *by the architecture.* The U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters is the opposite of a featureless, bunkered bureaucracy; it is a highly *experiential* design both for the 21st-century employees who work there and for visitors. Some of the cubicle farms are large, but one is always turning the corner to experience yet another surprising view of a creatively landscaped courtyard, the forested flanks, a historic building, another wing of the headquarters building, or a distant panorama. This starts, in fact, at the visitor checkpoint building in which, immediately adjacent to the X-ray scanner, is a window framing a picture-perfect view of the pond with the lowest wing of the building beyond.

One suspects—and hopes—that this will become a model for future large agency headquarters.

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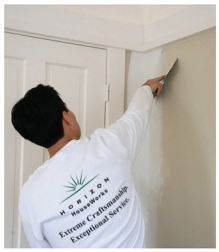

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Main façade of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Window on the World:

Global Think Tank's Headquarters Tailored to Local Context

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Conference anteroom.

Photo © Christopher Barrett

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is one of those Washington institutions that bespeak quiet power. A bipartisan think tank focusing on foreign affairs and national security, CSIS has helped to frame policy discussions on issues ranging from Defense Department reform to climate change to health care. Its Board of Trustees is studded with prominent people, many of whom once held senior government positions, including former secretary of state Henry Kissinger and former Democratic senator Sam Nunn.

Founded in 1962 as the Center for Strategic Studies at Georgetown University, CSIS became a fully independent non-profit organization in 1987. For 35 years, it was headquartered in a nondescript commercial office building on K Street, but a few years ago the organization bought a vacant site on Rhode Island Avenue, NW, near Scott Circle, with the intention of building a new home from the ground up. After issuing a request for proposals to more than a dozen architecture firms, CSIS then invited four firms to participate in a design competition, eventually narrowing the list of prospective firms to two. Representatives from the organization then conducted extensive in-office interviews and work sessions with the two finalist firms. Ultimately, **Hickok Cole Architects** prevailed and won the commission.

"We feel that design competitions are not the best way to select an architect," admitted **Michael E. Hickok, FAIA,** a senior principal and founder of the firm, "but this was a great client." Laughing, he added, "Their only downside was that they were too smart! They had a high need to know throughout the process. They challenged our ideas and were thoroughly engaged. We loved working with them."

As if to prove Hickok's point early on, CSIS came into the project with an unusually clear and detailed list of requirements for the building. First and foremost, it was to incorporate a world-class conference center. Hickok estimated that CSIS hosts more than 500 conferences a

Project: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC

Architects: **Hickok Cole Architects**
Landscape Architects: **Trace**
Lighting Designers: **Bliss Fasman**
Structural Engineers: **Thornton Tomasetti**
MEP Engineers: **Dewberry**
Civil Engineers: **Wiles Mensch Corporation**
Audiovisual Consultants: **RTKL**
Building Envelope Consultants: **CDC**
Specifications Consultants: **Heller & Metzger**
Traffic Consultants: **Wells + Associates**
Lobby Chandelier Designer: **Sosolimited**
Owner's Representative/Project Manager: **JLL (Jones Lang Lasalle)**
General Contractor: **HITT Contracting, Inc.**

year, often involving foreign and American dignitaries of very high rank, though usually with little fanfare (CSIS is fundamentally an academic institution that conducts its research and hashes through ideas behind the scenes, until detailed analysis and recommendations are ready for public consumption). Complementing the conference facilities would be office space for the organization's resident experts and more than 100 associate staff members.

Like many properties in DC's densely-packed downtown, the deep, mid-block site that CSIS purchased is hemmed in on three sides. Immediately to the east is the University of California Washington Center, while to the west, just across a narrow alley, is the headquarters of the Human Rights Campaign. Another narrow alley lies at the rear. For the design team, this tight context posed multiple challenges, including the difficulty of bringing adequate natural light to interior spaces. It also meant that opportunities for significant exterior architectural expression would be limited to the one façade along Rhode Island Avenue.

With those constraints in mind, Hickok Cole began the design process with an internal mini-competition, in which about 10 members of the firm spent a couple of intensive days developing ideas. "Our goal was to come out with three to four concepts," explained Hickok. "It's always been our experience that everybody just gravitates toward the best ideas. This time, everyone focused on one teeny, four-by-four-inch model of that [Rhode Island Avenue] façade. Usually, the initial design changes dramatically over the course of the project, but in this case, the end result is remarkably similar to that early little model."

CSIS describes itself as a "window on the world," and that phrase directly inspired the design of the principal façade. It consists of a well-proportioned glass curtain wall surrounded by an asymmetrical frame clad in pinkish Tennessee marble—the same stone used on such DC landmarks as the National Gallery of Art (both the West and East buildings) and the National Air & Space Museum. The tall base of the frame defines the entry and principal conference facilities. The wide vertical pier to the right (as one faces the building) marks the main service zone, including the elevator bank and restrooms. To the left is a slender, angled pier adjacent to the University of California building. At the top is the Board Room, which sits behind a glass wall angled sharply from the principal plane of the façade, creating space for an outdoor terrace sheltered by a thin horizontal band that completes the masonry frame.

While the frame-and-window motif alludes to CSIS's global mission, the building's distinctive geometries deftly relate it to the immediate urban context. "The building genuflects toward Scott Circle," said Hickok, who noted that the trapezoidal columns along the ground floor façade not only enhance security and privacy for the lobby, but also direct views from inside toward the green space of the circle. Similarly, the narrow triangular skylight above the top-floor terrace evokes a giant arrow

Main conference room, with the anteroom visible in the background.

Photo © Christopher Barrett

Main atrium connecting the conference levels.

Photo © Christopher Barrett

pointing in the direction of the circle's focal point, a statue of General Winfield Scott. Meanwhile, the wide, mostly opaque pier to the right of the entrance, while providing a compositional anchor for the façade, also creates a visual dialogue with the blank white wall of the 1950s-era Human Rights Campaign building next door.

The angles that animate the façade continue into the main interior spaces. In the lobby, trapezoidal marble floor slabs subtly direct visitors toward the reception desk and the ground-floor event spaces beyond, while a polygonal atrium and angled staircase connect the conference facilities on the lowest three levels. The copious use of white marble helps to reflect daylight entering through the roughly north-facing façade deep into these spaces. On the uppermost levels, another, smaller atrium brings light to internal offices and helps to define a gathering area called the Commons, where staff members may hold informal meetings and young interns have the opportunity to interact with more established scholars.

The project presented the architects with several technical challenges. Soon after excavation began, for example, it was discovered that what appeared to be typical urban soil was in fact riddled with the remnants of the building that previously occupied the site, which had apparently partially collapsed into its foundations. Substantial remedial work was required before work on the new building could begin. Perhaps the greatest engineering challenge was posed by the long, narrow bar forming the top of the front façade's masonry frame. Concrete could not span that distance efficiently, so the band was constructed out of steel, and thin slabs of marble were hung from that armature. The steel structure had to be built with a camber—a slight arch—so that, as the heavy stone slabs were attached, the structure would gradually settle into a perfectly horizontal position.

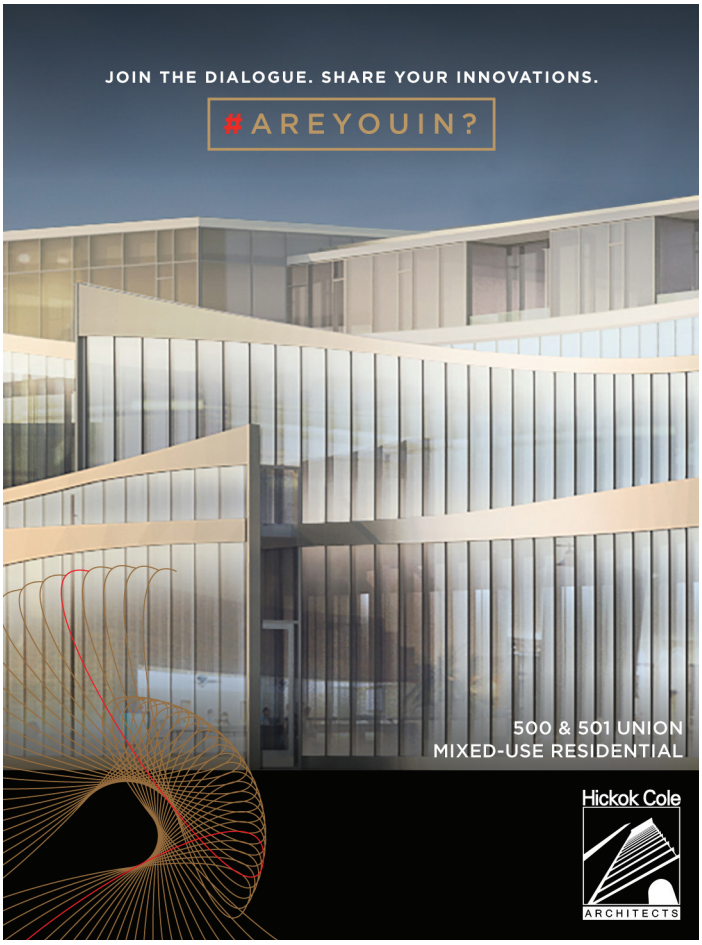
The CSIS headquarters was built at a cost of approximately $366 per square foot, not including land acquisition, furnishings, or soft costs such as professional fees. Given the building's luxurious materials and striking geometries, that is a remarkably modest budget. The relatively low cost was possible in part because the building has only one street-facing façade—the side and rear façades are made of cheaper materials and use much less glass. Hickok suggested that CSIS itself also deserved some of the credit: "It was a very high-powered group, which could have led to a dysfunctional process, but it didn't. They made decisions and stuck with them."

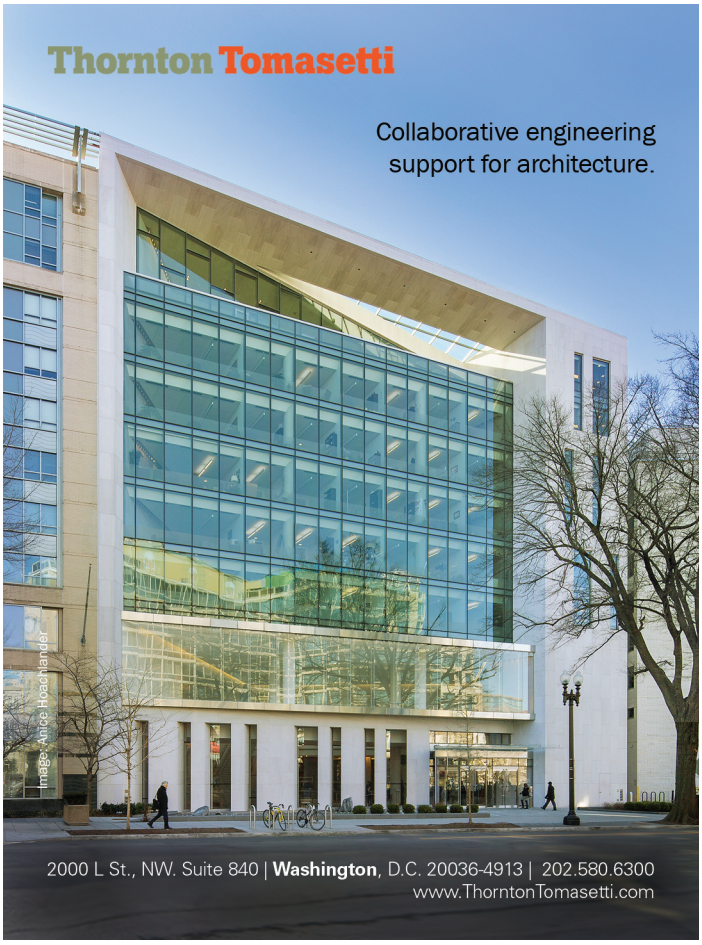
For an organization dedicated to solving some of the world's most daunting problems, perhaps the task of building its own headquarters was a relatively simple one. Nonetheless, in the case of the CSIS headquarters, the elegant, cost-effective result should serve as a reassuring example to architects and clients alike.

Photo © Christopher Barrett

Photo © Christopher Barrett

Above: Main atrium.
Below: The Commons.





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The chapel at the Calcagnini Contemplative Center.

Advanced Retreat:

Calcagnini Contemplative Center Reflects Mindful Simplicity

by Steven K. Dickens, AIA, LEED AP

All photos © Alan Karchmer Architectural Photographer

In architecture schools, "retreats" of various sorts are popular programs for thesis projects. There is a certain logic to this, given that people go to retreats for many of the same reasons that architecture students do thesis projects: to think deeply and independently; to challenge assumptions and question hierarchies; and to emerge from the experience, one hopes, enlightened and improved.

Moreover, a retreat works well for a thesis project on several practical levels. Its range of programmatic uses—sleeping areas, dining areas, communal meeting spaces, and so forth—is wide enough to support a variety of solutions and creative approaches. It's a good fit for a range of sites, but especially for rural settings free of the complex constraints of an urban context. Furthermore, by virtue of its purpose as a place for contemplation, a retreat tends to inspire thoughtful architectural expression at a variety of scales.

Unlike the world of academia, the Real World offers few opportunities to design retreats. But it does happen occasionally. The Calcagnini Contemplative Center of Georgetown University, by **Alan Dynerman, FAIA,** principal of **Dynerman Architects,** is a real place, but it shares the depth of intellectual consideration that is the hallmark of a successful thesis project. It is a project that was conceived on, and functions on, multiple levels beyond bricks and mortar.

Arthur Calcagnini is a successful businessman and Georgetown alumnus who took a particular interest in the university's variety of "Contemplatives in Action" retreats. The school has about 20 such programs, including religious retreats (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim; both silent and not) and retreats for faculty, students of various disciplines, and alumni. This facet of the Georgetown University experience is rare in American higher education. It is an outgrowth of the Jesuit tradition of retreats for spiritual exercises, and a manifestation of the concept of *cura personalis* ("caring for the whole person"), which is central to Jesuit life and learning. (Although Georgetown is open to students and faculty of all faiths or secularities, it was founded by the Society of Jesus and remains Jesuit-run and steered by the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the order.)

While serving on a student review panel at the University of Maryland, Dynerman met Alan Brangman, AIA, who at the time was the head of facilities at Georgetown. This led to a meeting in which Dynerman showed his portfolio, and Brangman saw a potentially good fit for an unusual project—the proposed retreat center in rural Clarke County, Virginia. Dynerman had

Project: Georgetown University Calcagnini Contemplative Center, Bluemont, VA

Architects: **Dynerman Architects**
Structural Engineers: **McMullan Associates**
MEP Engineers: **Comfort Design**
Civil Engineers: **Patton Harris Rust & Associates**
General Contractor: **Howard Shockey & Sons/Walnutdale Building Co.—A Joint Venture**

The campus of the Calcagnini Contemplative Center, with the chapel at left and the dining hall at right.

designed houses in rural Shenandoah settings, including one with a big fieldstone fireplace that particularly appealed to Brangman, and also some unusual projects that one might categorize as "places for thoughtful interaction," including Hodgson House and Conversation Garden at St. John's College in Annapolis, and the non-profit AED Conference Center carved from a parking garage in DC. Moreover, Dynermans's portfolio reflected a broad spectrum of stylistic approaches. "I'm 'old school,' I suppose, in that I'm interested in making spaces where human interactions are ennobled," he said, adding that no single school of architectural thought has cornered the market on such ennobling.

Dynerman met Arthur Calcagnini and his wife Nancy and learned of their ideas for what, at that time, was to be a $2.5 million venture. "Buildings like this are acts of charity," noted Dynerman. "They are expressions of loyalty [of alumni] and the best intentions and aspirations of people." Immediately realizing that the budget and aspirations did not match, Dynerman did a feasibility study that priced out at $6.5 million. That was a big jump, but the Calcagninis understood the rationale for the larger budget, according to Dynerman. "They got it, they loved it, they funded it."

The resultant complex, which was dedicated in 2013, consists of a series of one-story buildings loosely wrapping courtyards. The eastern courtyard is open on one side to views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is mostly framed by non-residential components of the program—the Dining Hall and Community Center. The western courtyard, in contrast, is mostly enclosed, with slot views of the surrounding woods and meadows through breaks between the buildings. It is surrounded on three sides by the residential "cabins" and, on the fourth, by the Community Center.

An interdenominational chapel is carefully positioned to create a third courtyard—the Entrance Court—where it engages the other uses but remains a bit apart. Glimpses of it can be seen from most of the rest of the complex, but the views are narrow, restricted, even a touch mysterious at times. In contrast, the Community Center, positioned among the three courtyards, is clearly seen. This site

View of the chapel.

planning mirrors the role of religion at the university: The chapel is special and important and its presence is always felt, but it is not at the center of the complex.

With the exception of the chapel, the basic architectural vocabulary of the center is drawn from vernacular buildings of the Shenandoah region. "Rural buildings are typical and simple," says Dynerman, pointing to readily recognizable archetypes such as barns and farmhouses. He saw this as advantageous for a retreat—people "know the kit of parts, so you [the architect] play with it to heighten the consciousness." That is, when an archetype is simple and well-known, people notice when an aspect is changed, and thus even minor variations can be thought-provoking.

At the Calcagnini Center, two basic elements of the "kit of parts"—roofs and walls—are separated in various ways. The roofs of the chapel and community center are big, sheltering gables, but with a twist. Dynerman introduced subtle angles to the eaves, which modulate the sense of openness and shelter. At the cabins, shed roofs are visually lifted over the low cedar-clad boxes of the primary enclosures. At the Dining Hall, the shed roof dives behind a taller cedar-clad box, which contains service areas and forms a signage wall for arriving visitors. In some locations, a line of high windows separates the roof and wall. All of these moves might fertilize, consciously or subconsciously, a "eureka" moment in a visitor's thinking, a metaphorical insight that could guide one's serious, mindful consideration of a subject. Such moments are central to the contemplative retreat, and Dynerman's myriad modulations of archetypal forms are just the sort of thing that might nurture them.

The complex's palette of materials is intentionally neutral and simple, creating a modest backdrop for human activity. For example, western red cedar boards, which clad most of the buildings and some interior walls, are regularized to reduce their visual prominence. At the chapel, smooth white stucco is introduced as a second exterior material, punctuated by small, randomly placed rectangular openings. The white walls form a *tabula rasa* that invokes, in non-specific terms, a wide range of cultural references, quietly framing most any religious exercise.

The Calcagnini Contemplative Center campus.

At times, the meditative mind might delve or digress into the background elements of a space. If one were to do so in a room lined with the cedar boards, one might notice that although all boards are the same size and general appearance, no two have the same graining pattern. Regarding the white walls, one might connect the dots (in the form of the rectangular recesses) in various ways, playing against the movement of people in the foreground. It's not a stretch to see such subtle patterns as potential sources of insight for a contemplative retreat participant.

Various architectural details also harbor small surprises. The wood columns, for instance, appear from afar to be large, monolithic posts, but up close one can see that they are multiple pieces of dimensional lumber bound together. The connecting bolts, plates, and straps are positioned so as to evoke the bases and capitals of classical columns. These elements not only reflect thorough detailing, but also suggest a variety of cultural and aesthetic metaphors that may further stimulate retreat participants' thinking.

The physical facility of the Calcagnini Contemplative Center is, appropriately enough, the fruit of a long and thoughtful design process. The result is a place that blends rustic simplicity with surprisingly intricate architectural forms and details, offering food for thought in a directed, mindful manner. It turns out that the real thing can be even more compelling than the academic exercise.

Interior of the chapel.

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Entry portico of Kol Shalom, with the administrative and sanctuary wing at left, and the educational wing at right.

All photos © 2013, Alan Karchmer

Symbol of Faith:

Religious Imagery Enriches Modern Synagogue

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

Anyone driving eastward on Darnestown Road near Montgomery Avenue in Rockville, Maryland, is likely to catch a glimpse of the distinctive entry portico of the new Kol Shalom synagogue. Someone familiar with the history of modern architecture may think the stucco-covered form to be a sculptural gesture reminiscent of the work of certain mid-twentieth-century architects such as Le Corbusier. A particularly attentive observer might even note that the design of the portico allows for north-facing clerestory windows over the lobby, admitting soft natural light to the interior. Others may just assume that the portico is a practical feature that protects visitors from the elements as they enter the building.

In fact, the portico is all of those things, but it is much more. To members of Kol Shalom's congregation, or indeed anyone familiar with the Hebrew language, the form of the portico is instantly recognizable as an abstraction of the Hebrew letter ה , transliterated as "he" in the Roman alphabet. The letter often serves as a symbol for the word *HaShem*, meaning "the Name," which is a term used by some Jews when referring to God in non-liturgical contexts. Thus the portico, while a graceful architectural flourish in its own right, is also a subtle yet eloquent expression of the building's sacred purpose.

This seamless melding of architectural form and symbolism is a hallmark of the new synagogue, which was designed by **Shinberg.Levinas Architects.** Throughout the building, elements that may at first appear to be purely decorative often become quite meaningful when considered carefully or when viewed at close range. The result is a rich visitor experience in a building of modest size and budget.

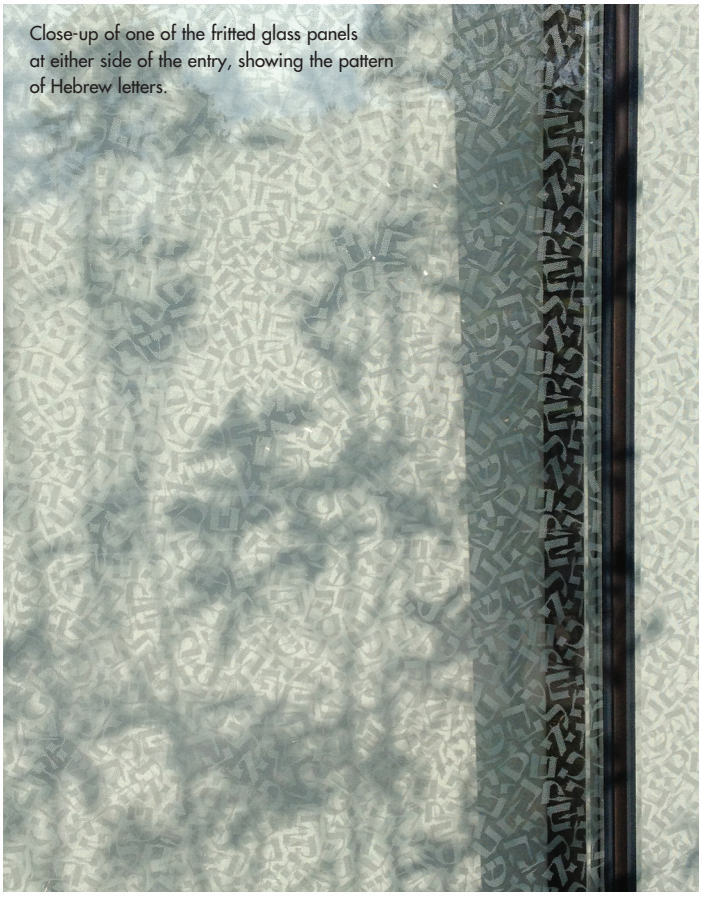
"The idea was to create a building that is not just a place to pray, but a place to be—like a second home," said **Salo Levinas, Assoc. AIA,** a principal of Shinberg.Levinas. The congregation

Lobby, with main entrance beyond.

Close-up of one of the masonry panels bearing natural imagery associated with Jewish holidays.

Project: Congregation Kol Shalom, Rockville, MD

Architects: **Shinberg.Levinas Architects**
Lighting Designers: **ICON**
Structural Engineers: **Shemro Engineering**
MEP Engineers: **Capitol Engineering Group**
Civil Engineers: **Macris, Hendricks and Glascock**
General Contractor: **Forrester Construction Company**


Close-up of one of the fritted glass panels at either side of the entry, showing the pattern of Hebrew letters.

asked the architects for a new synagogue that was humble yet inspirational. It should provide a sense of protection but must be welcoming. The building should also be "connected to nature," not only by virtue of high standards in sustainable design, but also through its architectural expression.

The finished building consists of two wings, with the sanctuary and administrative offices occupying a wing running roughly parallel to the main road. The second wing, extending toward the southwest at an obtuse angle in plan, houses classrooms for the synagogue's religious school for children in grades K-7. The current sanctuary is considered temporary: the congregation hopes to expand the building eastward at a later date, adding a new sanctuary and converting the current space into a social hall.

The long masonry walls lining the two wings address several of the congregation's goals. Their opacity, for instance, creates a sense of protection and enclosure, thus fostering an inward focus

Sanctuary.

that is conducive to worship and religious study. The walls also evoke nature in two ways: first, their varied textures and striations suggest natural rock formations, and second, they incorporate decorative panels featuring images that recall Jewish holidays connected to nature. At the same time, the walls serve to relate the building to its neighborhood context. The horizontal emphasis of the masonry bands and the linear windows allude to the movement of cars on the busy road nearby, while the walls' low scale is consistent with that of nearby houses and other buildings.

Natural imagery continues on the main entry doors, which depict the Tree of Life through cut-outs in bronze panels. Meanwhile, on the glass walls to either side of the entry portico, the Hebrew alphabet once again plays a role. These glass panes, which face west and therefore could transmit a great deal of heat and light on sunny summer afternoons, feature a ceramic coating called a frit, which reduces solar gain without blocking views. From afar, the frit appears to be a typical, regular geometrical pattern, but up close, one can see that the coating is composed of a jumble of Hebrew letters. Interestingly, according to Levinas, the use of letters in this way was partially inspired by the decorative Arabic script that appears in many mosques.

The current sanctuary is an airy, flat-ceilinged room with moveable seating. The focal point of the space is the ark—the cabinet containing the Torah scrolls. Typically, an ark is a narrow, vertical receptacle that hides the scrolls until they are revealed at specific points during services. In this case, Levinas worked with local artisans to design a wide ark that appears to float against the back wall. New York glass artist Ellen Mandelbaum created the translucent stained-glass panels. In keeping with tradition, she applied a thin layer of white glass to the clear panels directly over the Torah so that the scrolls remain hidden until the appropriate moment. Because the room is expected to serve as the sanctuary only temporarily, the ark is designed to be readily moveable into the permanent sanctuary when it is built.

Fulfilling the congregation's directives regarding sustainability, the building has achieved LEED Gold certification. It uses geothermal energy and boasts a green roof, and most materials came from local sources. The entry canopy, which might appear to be made of poured-in-place concrete, is actually constructed of a steel frame encased in a stucco-like cladding system. While this assembly saved money, it also allowed for a much more energy-efficient structure, with substantial insulation at all junctures between the interior and exterior of the portico.

In many respects, Kol Shalom is more than meets the eye. Levinas sees that as an expression of Jewish faith and culture. "In the Jewish tradition," he said, "there is a constant process of discovering. The idea is that discovery leads to maturity. We see this as an environment where people can grow and become part of a community."

Right: The ark, with sliding panels in the open position, revealing the Torah.
Far Right: A corner of the sanctuary, in which the glass wall seems to disappear into the rocks at ground level.

Entry portico, with fritted glass walls visible at left and right.

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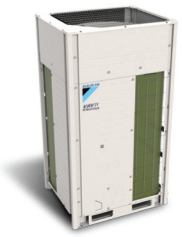

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"The Commons," the principal gathering space of the Potomac Intermediate School.

All photos © Chris Ambridge, cox graae + spack

Potomac Place:

Independent School Continues Revamp of its Campus

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

Most adults remember that age: that awkward, exciting, terrible age when they were no longer little kids but still far from maturity. An age when their bodies were changing in sometimes alarming ways, and their social lives were becoming increasingly complex, and often fraught with insecurity. It was a time filled with countless distractions that could easily derail the academic pursuits of even very dedicated students.

Of course, everyone matures at his or her own rate, but most students probably hit that particularly difficult age around the 7th and 8th grades. With that in mind, in 1951, the Potomac School, a venerable independent K-12 school in McLean, Virginia, created a special division comprising just those two grades. Now known as the Intermediate School, it is one of four divisions at Potomac, the others being the Lower School for kindergarten through 3rd grade,

Second floor corridor, with color accents on the floor.

Entry portico.

View through a corner of the Commons toward the main classroom wing.

Project: Potomac School, Intermediate School, McLean, VA

Architects: **cox graae + spack architects**
Structural Engineers: **McMullan Associates**
MEP Engineers: **Metropolitan Consulting Engineers**
General Contractor: **Coakley & Williams Construction**

the Middle School for grades 4 through 6, and the Upper School for grades 9 through 12.

A partially renovated and partly new Intermediate School wing is the latest addition to the Potomac School's 90-acre campus, which has been undergoing a comprehensive modernization over the past couple of decades. A new Upper School (featured on the cover of the Fall 2007 issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC*) opened in 2006, followed by a new Lower School building in 2009, and the Flag Circle Building, housing dining facilities and administrative offices, in 2012. All of these projects, along with a performing arts center that opened in 1999, were designed by the firm of **cox graae + spack architects,** which has been working with Potomac since 1997, long enough for several classes to make their way through the school's full 13-year curriculum.

"The design for the Intermediate School was really about identity," said **Joanna Schmickel, AIA, LEED AP BD+C,** who has been principal-in-charge for all of cox graae + spack's work at the Potomac School over the past decade. "Previously, they had only a door leading to a double-loaded corridor, with no central gathering space. [The administrators] wanted the Intermediate School to have its own culture—to be its own family. They wanted to give these kids a sense of responsibility and independence, but with a clear adult presence just an arm's length away."

View into the Commons at left, with the classroom wing at right.

The Commons.

Exterior view showing juxtaposition of natural stone, steel, and glass.

The finished project, consisting of about 31,000 square feet of renovated space plus a roughly 9,000-square-foot addition, fulfills those goals while maintaining the consistent architectural character that Schmickel and her colleagues have developed over the course of multiple projects. All of the newer buildings incorporate grey steel, natural stone, and abundant glass, though these materials are composed in different ways in the various buildings. On the interiors, spots of bright color add contrast and allow for variations on the neutral palette. For the Intermediate School, the architects also introduced wood siding to help distinguish it further from the other divisions.

Each of the classroom buildings that cox graae + spack has designed boasts a core gathering space thoughtfully scaled to the ages of the students who use it. The Upper School, for instance, features the Crossroads, a three-story space with a collegiate character appropriate for students on the brink of adulthood. In the Intermediate School, the core space is the Commons, which is two stories tall and furnished with comfortable seating. Its focal point is a wall of wood bookcases with a large flat-screen television. The atmosphere is simultaneously domestic and institutional, striking a balance for children who are negotiating the tricky transition from familial dependence to greater freedom and more complex socialization.

The new academic spaces in the Intermediate School allow for more flexible, creative instruction than previously possible in the existing building. On the second floor, for example, several informal breakout areas, nestled among more traditional classrooms, provide places for the kinds of semi-independent study and interaction that fit the school's expectations for students at this level. The arrangement of these spaces is clearly expressed on the exterior, with the classrooms clad in wood and projecting slightly beyond the breakout spaces, which are marked by floor-to-ceiling windows.

Another major determinant of the building's layout was the Potomac School's emphasis on teaching students to become good stewards of the natural environment. "From an architect's point of view, that's really fun," Schmickel said. "We had the opportunity to make connections between the building and nature. Every classroom that can open to [the landscape] does. There is a lot of outdoor space for learning." Toward that end, cox graae + spack also renovated an existing teaching garden at the southern end of the campus, which had become overgrown and disused but is now an orderly, living laboratory for science and other classes.

At this point, the Middle School is the only major facility on the Potomac campus that has not undergone a full renovation or replacement. "We hope to get that project, too," said Schmickel enthusiastically. Given the long-standing and apparently quite successful relationship between cox graae + spack and the Potomac School, it seems a safe bet that someday she will be getting that call.

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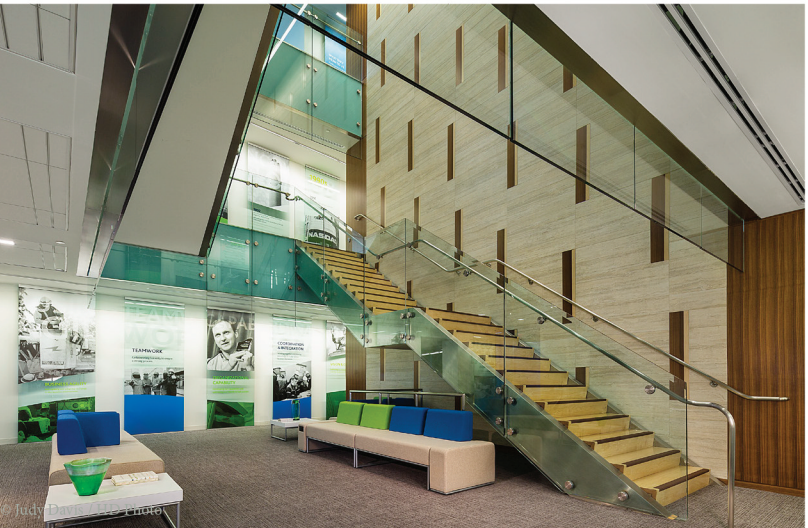

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Rec Meets High-Tech:

Suburban Complex Offers Place for Leisure and Learning

by Denise Liebowitz

Main façade of the Southern Regional Technology & Recreation Complex.

A new breed of recreation center has arrived in communities around the country. Once focused on organized sports and gyms designed to keep restless kids off the street and out of trouble, today's neighborhood recreation centers foster an intergenerational culture of healthy lifestyles, sustainable wellness, nutrition, and exercise. Residents of Fort Washington in Prince George's County, Maryland, wanted not only this new style of recreation center, but also a community amenity that offered learning opportunities and technology training—a place that not only attracted bored teenagers but that also got everyone in the neighborhood off the couch and out of the house.

"The community has been working toward this for decades" said Yvonne Johnson, AIA, architectural supervisor for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and project manager for the Southern Regional Technology and Recreation Complex, which was designed by **Sorg Architects** and opened in the summer of 2013. "Early on they decided they didn't want just another sports center. They wanted it to be a learning and leisure center with science and technology and a facility for learning new skills. They wanted a place-making destination for everyone from two to ninety-two years old. The Sorg team got it before we even put pen to paper."

"We have done quite a few of these recreation centers starting with the Kennedy Recreation Center in DC," recalled **Suman Sorg, FAIA,** founding principal and chief designer of the firm that bears her name. "When we were selected by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, they wanted and we wanted to do something different from what had been done here before. In the past, many of these suburban recreation facilities were done very traditionally with bricks and mullioned windows—they all looked like big houses and very few architecture firms were doing them."

Sorg and her team envisioned a design that was transparent, invited the public in, and connected with the surrounding residential neighborhood and the wooded landscape to the rear of the property. "For me," said Sorg, "contextual architecture is really about modesty. These are not McMansions," she said referring to the surrounding residential area, "they are suburban houses and the scale and proportion of our building needed to be modest."

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Multipurpose Room.

Photo © Robert Benson Photography

For starters, the design team moved the parking away from the front of the building and off to the side. Then they pushed the two-story elements of the building like the gymnasium and the climbing wall to the back of the structure so that the street façade could be kept low and respectful of the neighbors. A boldly curving sweep of multi-colored glass reflects the surrounding houses while its transparency beckons the community in. To the rear of the glass curtain wall section, which is treated to reduce glare, solar gain, and heat loss, the taller building forms are individually articulated and clad in architectural metal panels.

The primary organizing element of the 37,000-square-foot interior is the concourse—a curving circulation spine lined with workout areas, dance studios, a recording studio, a climbing wall, café, kitchen, and classrooms. The idea was to make the various learning and recreation activities visible and accessible to everyone. Instead of closed-off, compartmentalized rooms, the design offers activated spaces that encourage everyone to join in. Sorg thinks of the concourse as a porch where people visually and physically connect with learning and recreational activities and with one another.

Project: Southern Regional Technology & Recreation Complex, Ft. Washington, MD

Architects: **Sorg Architects**
Structural Engineers: **Smislova, Kehnemui & Associates**
MEP Engineers: **Allen & Shariff Corporation**
Civil Engineers: **A. Morton Thomas & Associates**
General Contractor: **Tuckman-Barbee Construction Co.**

A gently curving steel stair leads to the mezzanine and the perforated metal panel that clads the stairs meanders through the concourse as a screen and defines, along with clear and opaque glass panels, areas for learning and socializing.

The center includes a gymnasium with room for four basketball courts, an elevated track, and a multipurpose room that can host weddings, business meetings, and community events. A science lab is designed for conducting simple experiments and demonstrations of hands-on engineering principles, and in the digital recording studio a professional sound engineer teaches students of all ages recording, mixing, editing, and mastering. In fact, there isn't much that's not happening

Main entry.

Photo © Robert Benson Photography

Entry and concourse.

Photo © Robert Benson Photography

West façade.

Photo © Robert Benson Photography

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Concourse and staircase.

Photo © Robert Benson Photography

at the Tech Rec complex. Current offerings include Zumba for seniors, young artist workshops, video editing, pre-school hip-hop, robotics, Tai Chi, fitness boot camp, math skills, line dancing, cosmetology, and much more. "The health and wellness portion of the program has been very well thought out and is designed to accommodate those who are just beginning their [regimens] in addition to those who are serious about their sports and workouts," said Sorg.

The building is poised for LEED Silver certification and, in spite of a strict budget, incorporates numerous sustainable strategies such as a stormwater management program that includes a pond, several bio-retention areas, and a green roof on a large portion of the structure. The building has a geothermal mechanical system consisting of a ground-source heat exchanger and high-efficiency heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning. Twenty percent of construction materials came from salvaged, refurbished or reused materials, and low-VOC-emitting materials are used throughout.

The center includes an environmental learning room that provides lessons using some of the building's green features. In many ways, the building's technology and up-to-date sustainability features are all teaching tools at Tech Rec. "We all learned in so many ways," said M-NCPPC's Johnson. "A new building with this much new technology and construction techniques has required our facility managers to really upgrade their skills."

"Public clients need transparency," added Johnson. "We have to get the biggest benefit on public tax dollars and we did it with this project. This has turned out to be a transitional project for M-NCPPC and is really the model now for how to involve the community. This facility is a truly a manifestation of the hopes and desires of that community."

In talking about her team's exhaustive community consultation process that dealt with all aspects of the design and program of the project, Sorg said, "Sometimes there can be a certain timidity when dealing with under-served communities, but there certainly wasn't any here. I wanted a building that doesn't hold back in any way and I was confident I could get the community to come along with us in the design process. And they absolutely did."

Apparently so, since Sorg Architects is now at work on M-NCPPC's new Aquatic Center right next door.

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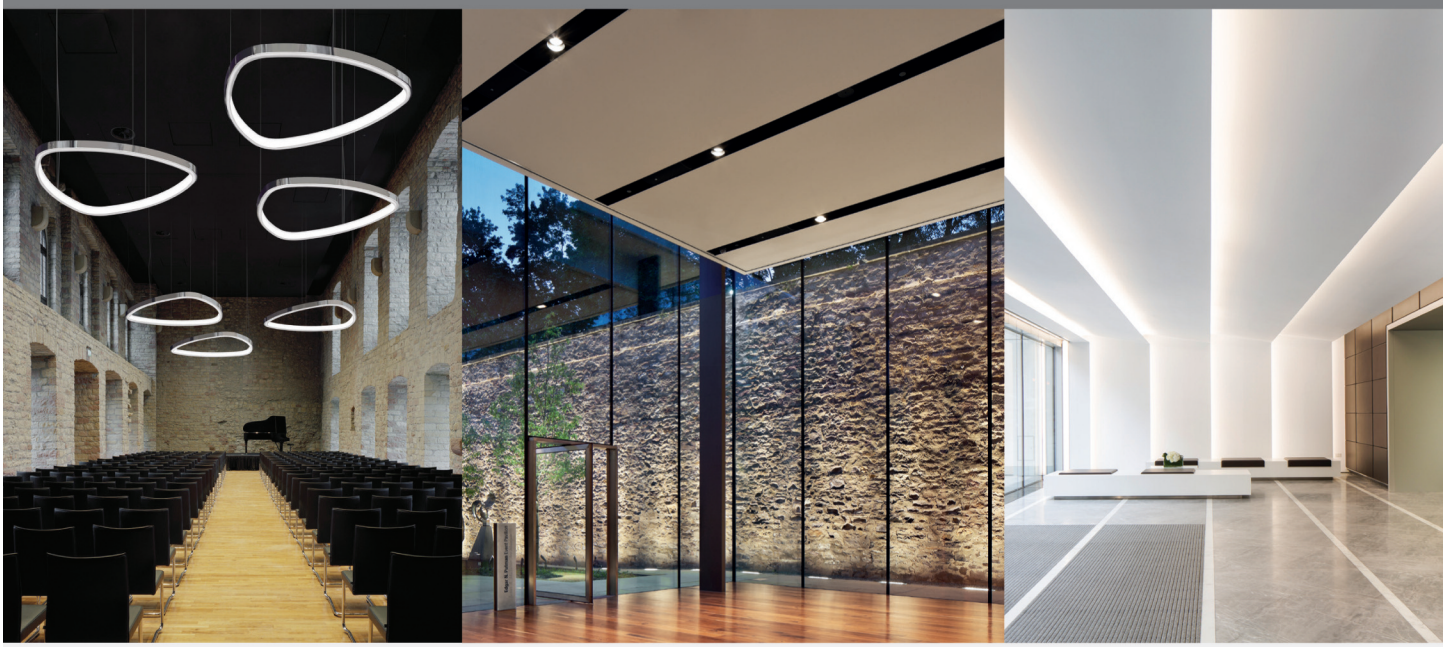

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Project: Union Station Bus Terminal, Washington, DC

Architects: **Studio Twenty Seven Architecture**
Structural Engineers: **Ehlert/Bryan**
MEP Engineers: **MCE Engineers**
Pavilion Fabricator: **Compmillennia**
General Contractor: **Monarc Construction**

Wait & See:

New Designs for Travel and Tourism Facilities

by Ronald O'Rourke

Rear view of the information and retail pods of the Union Station Bus Terminal.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis

Information pod, with the waiting room visible in the background.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis

Information and retail pods.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis

The two projects reviewed in this article both use an insertion of new design to improve an existing facility used by the public. But whereas in one case the goal was to develop a design that would draw attention away from the dreary, cavernous space in which the project is located, in the other it was to design a facility that would do the opposite by showcasing the ornate beauty of the historic hall that houses it.

A New Bus Terminal at Union Station

Intercity bus travel has made a comeback in Washington in recent years, with several companies now offering economical service to and from New York and other destinations. To help capitalize on that development, Union Station in 2012 was designated as the city's new central hub for intercity buses. The new hub was placed in the massive parking structure connected to the rear of the train station, two levels up from the room where rail passengers wait to board trains.

Bus terminals are often held up as examples of uninspired or depressing design, and the initial bus hub at Union Station was a case in point. Situated in a corner of the hulking, utilitarian parking structure, the hub was squeezed into an awkwardly configured spot dominated by escalators and bare concrete. To make the most of this challenging site, Union Station Redevelopment Corporation (USRC) selected **Studio Twenty Seven Architecture.**

"The bus terminal is removed from the facilities and amenities of the majestic Beaux Arts masterpiece next door," said **Todd Ray FAIA,** the principal in charge of design for the project, referring to Union Station itself. "We were asked to design a solution that would provide amenities to the bus traveler without requiring them to leave the bus deck." The goal, the firm says, was to create a sense of place in a situation of placelessness.

"The site was neither interior nor exterior," said Beverley Swaim-Staley, president and CEO of USRC. "Open to the air and the elements, the solution had to provide a welcoming, comfortable, and enclosed—yet fully visible—environment within an aging structure that was neither warm nor inviting." The parking structure "was built for machines, not people; it would need an injection of humanity."

Searching for an organizing concept for the project, the firm hit on the metaphor of a Zen rock garden. "Travel, and particularly bus travel, is a meditative experience, projecting the mind beyond the current place," Ray said. At the same time, "this type of travel inherently comes with the tremendous visual accosting of advertisements. We were seeking to create a place of mental refuge." The rock garden metaphor also responds to "the pure physicality of the site—a grey parking deck striated by travel lanes and dividing strips, in which we wished to strategically place small, iconic pavilions."

The project consists of three such pavilions. The first—a linked pair of ovoid structures that houses an information stand and a small retail store selling food, drinks, souvenirs, and traveler supplies—represents the rocks in the garden. In keeping with the meditative theme, the flat, yellow-painted sides of the pavilion are textured with raised Morse Code dots and dashes that spell out lyrics from "Soul Meets Body," a song by the musical group Death Cab for Cutie:

> *'Cause in my head there's a Greyhound station*
> *Where I send my thoughts to far off destinations*
> *So they may have a chance of finding a place*
> *Where they're far more suited than here.*

The second pavilion is an enclosed, climate-controlled waiting room with nicely detailed wood-slat walls, an outdoor terrace extension with bamboo plants, and floor-to-ceiling windows on three sides that provide views to the terrace extension and other parts of the facility. The peaceful, 1,425-square-foot waiting room,

Waiting room at left, with information and retail pods in the right background.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis

which would make a nice addition to a contemporary suburban home, serves as the rock garden's *pochi,* or meditation porch.

The third pavilion, made from a recycled shipping container, houses restrooms. The three structures were designed to last about 10 years, which is when the area is projected to be redeveloped as part of the mammoth Burnham Place project envisaged for Union Station.

"The garage, bus terminal, and train station entry had to remain in operation 24/7, so construction had to be phased to ensure maximum pedestrian safety and minimal patron disruption," Ray said. "This requirement led to the desire to have the pavilions fabricated offsite as much as practical and then installed overnight, when minimal pedestrian traffic was present." The retail and restroom pavilions were built and installed this way.

The design "responded to the constraints of the site and fulfilled the requirements of the project brief, addressing the needs of the passenger population. But it also took the project to a higher level," Swaim-Staley said. "Studio Twenty Seven used the project to raise questions about the nature of travel in the 21st century. In the process they also developed an innovative method to build a geometrically challenging structure [the ovoid-shaped pavilion] on a limited budget. The result achieves Union Station's desire for design excellence, and it adds a new, small, but important icon within its walls."

Combined with KGP Design Studio's futuristic bicycle transit center (see the Winter 2010 issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC*, page 40), Studio Twenty Seven's new bus terminal pavilions make Union Station a bit of a hotbed of leading-edge design in Washington.

"USRC has been tremendously supportive through the process," Ray said. "The staff at USRC are historians and visionaries. They appreciate the national treasure they have in Union Station, but also support what the future may hold."

A Visitor Center for the White House

A short bus ride away from Union Station is the White House Visitor Center, a National Park Service facility located in the Commerce Department building on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, between 14th and 15th Streets. The visitor center fills the Malcolm Baldrige Great Hall, a large, beautifully detailed room that spans the front of the building at street level.

From 1932, when the building was completed, until 1967, the hall was used as the Patent Search Room, which was a place where researchers could comb through patents cataloged by the Commerce Department. Furnished with rows of wooden desks and chairs, the hall during that period looked something like the main reading room of a grand public library building.

The great hall's size, its proximity to the White House, and its rich architectural features—including limestone walls and arches, a coffered ceiling with finely carved details, and bronze chandeliers—led to its selection as the site for the new White House Visitor Center. Renovation of the room began in 1993, and the center opened in 1995.

The original center "was [created on] a bit of a shoestring budget, and some exhibits were built at the last minute in the nooks and crannies in that beautiful building," said John Riley of the non-profit White House Historical Association (WHHA). By 2010, the visitor center was in need of modernization.

To design the new facility, the National Park Service and WHHA turned to **SmithGroupJJR** and **Gallagher & Associates.** SmithGroupJJR—an architectural firm whose work includes the National Museum of the American Indian on the Mall and the sublime Normandy American Cemetery Visitor Center in France

The newly renovated White House Visitor Center, in historic Baldrige Hall at the Commerce Department Building.

Photo © Maxwell MacKenzie

(see the Winter 2007 issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC*)—provided architecture and engineering services for the project. Gallagher & Associates—a museum planning and design firm—worked closely with SmithGroupJJR for exhibit design.

When the original visitor center opened in 1995, "the primary mission of the facility was to distribute timed entry passes to the White House and provide a brief historical oversight of the White House and President's Park to visitors prior to their visit," said **David Greenbaum, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C,** vice president at SmithGroupJJR and design principal for the project. "With the elimination of daily timed entry following the

Project: White House Visitor Center, Washington, DC

Architects/MEP & Fire Protection Engineers: **SmithGroupJJR**
Exhibition Designers: **Gallagher & Associates**
Lighting Designers: **Available Light**
Structural Engineers: **Robert Silman Associates; Eckersley O'Callaghan & Partners**
Retail Consultants: **Manask & Associates**
Audiovisual Equipment Specialists: **PPI Consulting**
Cost Estimators: **Kirk Associates**
Acoustical Consultants: **Jaffe Holden Acoustics**
General Contractor: **Clark Construction Group**

The visitor center space before renovation.

Photo courtesy of SmithGroupJJR

The space following renovation.

Photo © Maxwell MacKenzie

events of 9/11, the facility's mission evolved to primarily serve as an educational center for nearly 700,000 visitors per year."

The renovated 16,000-square-foot facility, which opened in September, includes permanent displays with interactive exhibits on the role of the White House as home, office, ceremonial stage, and museum, as well as a space for temporary exhibits, a theater, a retail shop, and restrooms.

The permanent exhibits are arranged in a center-axis pattern that respects the hall's classical symmetry, with enough room between them to accommodate large crowds during peak tourist season. The display cases and seating benches are made of Corian and another synthetic material called 3form. "Corian is an opaque solid surface material, while 3form is a translucent solid surface material," Greenbaum explained. "Corian is very forgiving and can handle a lot of wear and tear, so we used it on surfaces that were subject to high traffic. 3form was used on the central elements, among other millwork, to create a softness to the linear forms." The largely white color of the display cases and benches alludes to the exterior color of the White House and provides a gentle contrast to the grey limestone and the brown-toned coffered ceiling.

"We purposefully, in working with the architectural team, talked about having a very minimalist palette," said Cybelle Jones, principal and creative director at Gallagher & Associates and exhibit design leader. "I think that was driven, first, by differentiating new and old so that we weren't competing with the decorative nature of the hall." The resulting overall color scheme of a largely white insertion into a somewhat darker historic envelope is comparable to the highly regarded design for the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

The tall windows running along the front of the Commerce Department building bathe the great hall in a gentle northern light. That's a nice feature for an artist's studio, but for an exhibit space, it can create a design challenge.

"Typically, exhibits are done in a black box environment," Greenbaum said. So the question became, "how can we do exhibits with an interior historic hall using daylight? That was something that we started to look at with the Normandy American Visitor Center."

"Usually, in exhibits that have beautiful artifacts and collections, you want to have a rather dramatic setting for those objects," Jones said. But in this case, "we couldn't fight the daylight. So we tried to use materials and backlit panels that created this kind of luminosity and this very brilliant, subtle light, so that nothing was overwhelmed or spot-lit, [and the light instead] creates this very lovely backdrop of glow."

The two-year renovation "was accomplished while respecting the historic fabric of Baldrige Hall and in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties," Greenbaum, said. "Because every surface was an original, historic finish, no new construction attaches to the historic finishes anywhere in the space." The design "exemplifies the National Park Service's larger mission of preservation of the nation's heritage, stewardship of the environment, and accessibility for all visitors."

The project incorporates sustainability features such as energy-efficient LED lighting and low-flow faucets and toilets in the rest-rooms, and is aiming for LEED-CI Silver certification. The design is also highly ADA compliant. "When I think of universal design, it's better design for everybody, said **Jonathan Cantwell** of SmithGroupJJR. "One of the things that I always like to say is to design for your future self."

The total cost of the Visitor Center was $12.5 million, with $7.5 million provided by the White House Historical Association, and the remaining $5 million by David M. Rubenstein, a prominent businessman and philanthropist who has funded a number of civic and cultural projects in the Washington area.

Views of the renovated White House Visitor Center.

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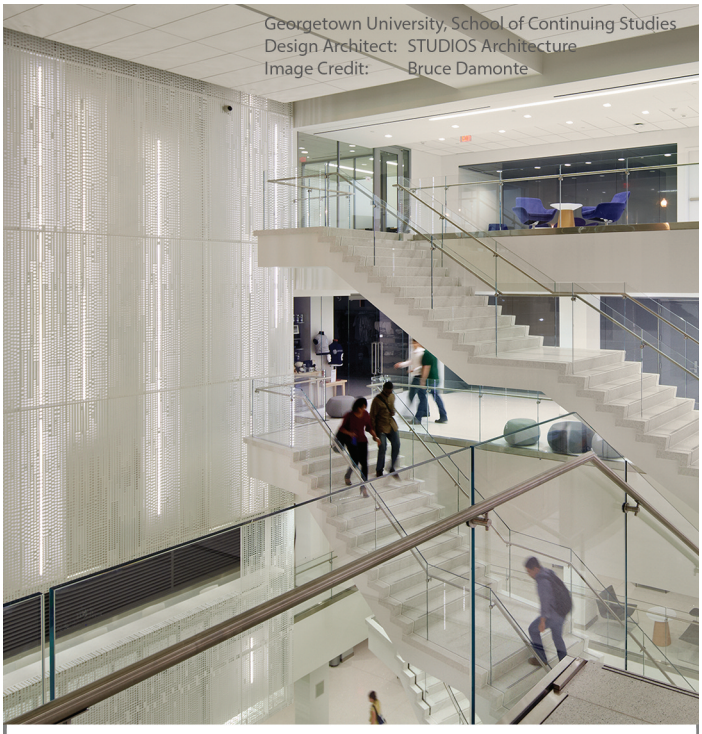

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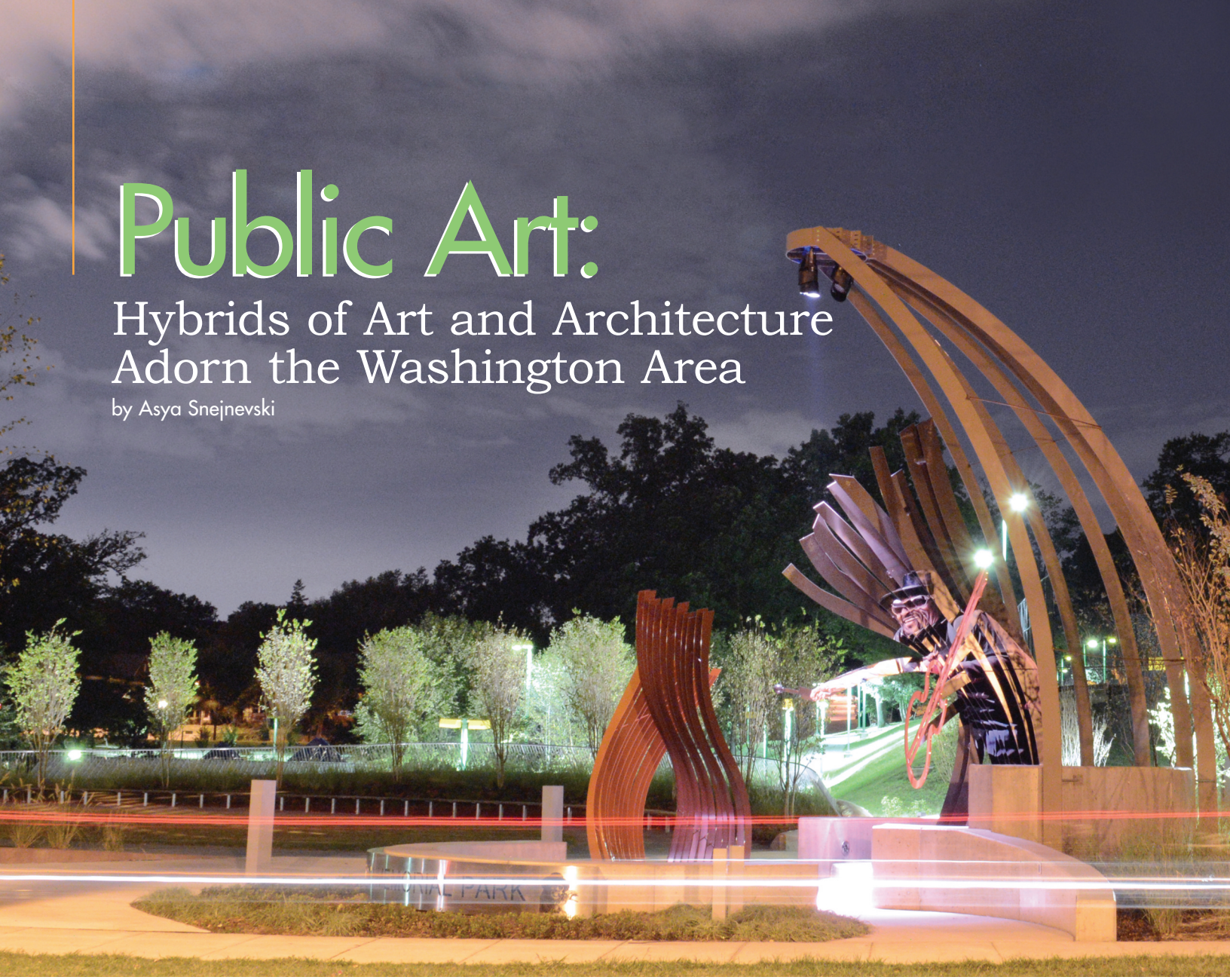
Public Art:

Hybrids of Art and Architecture Adorn the Washington Area

by Asya Snejnevski



Sculptures by Jackie Braitman at the Chuck Brown Memorial Park.

Photo © Diego Moya

Washington, DC, and Arlington, Virginia, have experienced a surge in public art recently. Have you noticed any new art installations pop up along your daily commute? Or maybe new structures in your local park or along the highway? Within the past 15 years, both cities have not only approved and begun to implement public art master plans, which seek to improve neighborhoods, strengthen communities, and create more sustainable cities, but have surpassed that original initiative to invite more public art to their streets. Through public works in parks, along busy highways, and on city blocks, the Washington metropolitan area is blossoming into an even more attractive and welcoming place to call home.

A Shrine to a Local Music Legend

One of the most recent additions to the DC cityscape is the Chuck Brown Memorial Park, part of the larger Langdon Park, on the corner of 20th and Franklin streets, NE. The park is the work of **Marshall Moya Design.** Chuck Brown, the "Godfather of Go-Go," was a key contributor to the DC music scene and a local hero. Go-Go music is a regional subgenre of funk that originated in the early 1960s in Washington, DC, with a strong focus on call and response between the musicians and the audience. Working on a tight schedule, the park was unveiled with great fanfare on August 22, 2014, on what would have been Brown's 78th birthday.

The Chuck Brown Memorial Park features a wall of images of Brown taken from photographs contributed by his children alongside posters advertising concerts held in the city. "We wanted to have actual images," says head architect **Michael Marshall, AIA, NOMA,** design director and principal at Marshall Moya Design, "pictures of him when he was younger and with his band. [We] wanted to be really clear about who he was and that he was a person of color." Because Marshall grew up just a

Graphic panels at the Chuck Brown Memorial Park. **Photo © Roy Lewis**

Overall view of the Chuck Brown Memorial Park. **Photo © Roy Lewis**

Side view of the memorial. **Photo © Diego Moya**

few blocks away from Langdon Park and played there as a kid, he had a strong idea of what kind of public space would benefit the community there today.

Marshall Moya Design was chosen to lead the Chuck Brown Memorial Park project through a highly selective competition held by the DC Department of General Services. The selection was especially appropriate considering that Marshall Moya Design had already completed the redesign of the Howard Theatre (featured in the Fall 2012 issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC*), a venue where Brown often played. The original plan for the park called for a large amphitheater, but after strong opposition from the community and residents of private houses adjacent to the park, the plan was scaled down to a memorial that could accommodate the Showmobile, a portable stage for hosting musical events. The permanent art installation designed by local artist Jackie L. Braitman shows an artistic representation of Chuck Brown holding a microphone outward, evoking the call-and-response nature of Go-Go music.

Project: Chuck Brown Memorial Park, Washington, DC

Architects: **Marshall Moya Design**
Landscape Architects: **Bradley Site Design**
Structural Engineers: **Robert Silman Associates**
MEP Engineers: **Metropolitan Engineering/Shapiro-O'Brien**
Civil Engineers: **Greening Urban**
General Contractor: **Broughton Construction Company**

Landscape design for the park was done in collaboration with landscape architect Sharon Bradley, ASLA, of Bradley Site Design. Bradley created sustainable rain gardens and selected plants appropriate for the area; the garden beds do not require watering because they are supported by stormwater that is managed on site. The original plans included cherry blossoms surrounding the park but they were later replaced with crape myrtle trees that are native to the DC area. Coincidentally, crape myrtles bloom in late summer, right around the time of Chuck Brown's birthday.

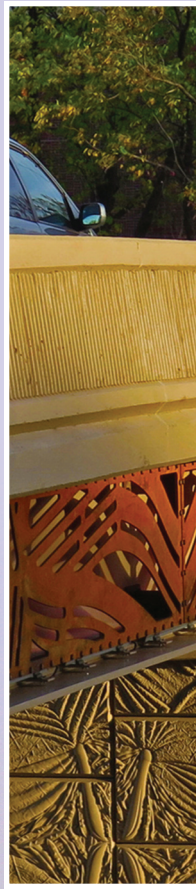
Beautifying a Boulevard

Another newly completed public project that incorporates local trees in its design is *Arlington Boulevard* by Vicki Scuri. The work was done in conjunction with a transportation project along Arlington Boulevard/Route 50 that replaced two bridges, reconstructed several interchanges and access roads, and improved pedestrian and bicycle paths. A Washington State-based artist and collaborator, Scuri focuses her work on public art, specializing in infrastructure and urban design. Her process and completed designs are tactile and site-specific, relating to the history and culture of the project's location.

Scuri chose to use the heart-shaped leaves and seedpods of the redbud tree that were growing in the area as inspiration for *Arlington Boulevard*. Scuri says she wanted a "classical but contemporary and cutting-edge" design that is experiential, restorative, and gives a lift to those passing by. The textured concrete designs of the redbud leaves along the walls, as well as the LED-backlit grills that gradually change color over a 15-minute period, aim to improve the mood of locals on their daily commute. According to Scuri, *Arlington Boulevard* was one of the first public art projects to be initiated in a high-traffic zone in the area. She "hopes that it will inspire [more of] this kind of work on the east coast."

Project: Arlington Boulevard, Arlington, VA

Artist: **Vicki Scuri**
Partners: **Virginia Department of Transportation; Arlington County; AECOM; Flippo Construction; Rhino Arts; and Color Kinetics**



Lighted grills of the *Arlington Boulevard* project.

Photo © Vicki Scuri

The Arlington Boulevard project, with the grillwork at left and textured concrete panels along the retaining wall in the background. **Photo © Vicki Scuri**

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Daytime view of *Quill*. Photo © Serge Hoeltschi

Quill at night. Photo © Serge Hoeltschi

Adding Fine Feather to a Featureless Façade

Quill, by artist Christian Moeller [no relation to the editor of this magazine], is also a new installation in the bustling Arlington area. This piece is located on the corner of North Fort Myer Drive, 19th Street, and North Moore Street on an exterior wall of the Dominion Power substation. Moeller, a professor of design media arts at UCLA whose work is often in the realm of public art, was inspired by the pattern of bald eagle feathers and sought to commemorate the bird's return to the Potomac River. Like Scuri's bridges, *Quill* also plays with light and changes as the day goes on. The feather pattern is made up of about 20,000 round dots on an aluminum surface that appear green in the sunlight. The dots also absorb solar energy throughout the day and then glow at night, while also reflecting streetlights and passing vehicles.

Marshall and Scuri agree that their projects are hybrids between art and architecture since they are creative representations of communal spaces. Public art often stems from ideas not only to improve the visual appeal of a city, but also to enhance the spirit of community. The designers of Chuck Brown Memorial Park, *Arlington Boulevard*, and *Quill* succeeded in creating public art that keeps the city's history alive by encouraging conversation and bringing joy to the residents of Washington and Arlington.

Project: Quill, Arlington, VA

Artist: **Christian Moeller**
Fabricators: **Manifold Forms; Carlson Arts**
Art Consultants: **Via Partnership**
Architects: **Davis, Carter, Scott**
Structural Engineers: **KCE Structural**
General Contractor: **Clark Construction Group**

Close-up of the luminous disks. Photo © Serge Hoeltschi

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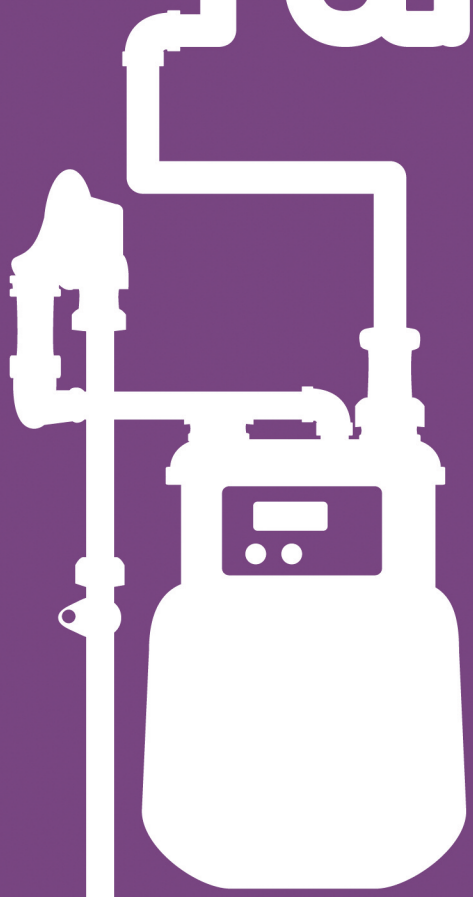

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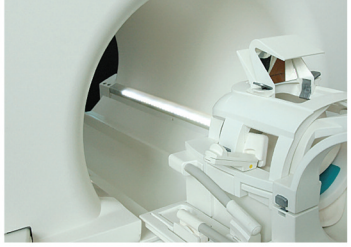

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